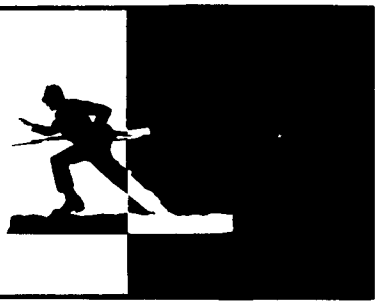
TRAINING NOTES



Convoy Live-Fire Exercises

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As disheartening as it is to read stories about units failing at the training centers, it is much worse to hear about units suffering casualties in combat. As the Army focuses more of its attention on operations other than war (OOTW), combat, combat support, and combat service support units are having to concentrate more of their training time on peace enforcement missions such as convoy security, route reconnaissance, and casualty evacuation operations. Such operations as those in Somalia and Bosnia provide just two examples of the possible roles for the Army on the battlefields of the future.

To prepare for these future roles, soldiers from all types of specialties, from infantryman to driver, will have to be ready to react and fight the enemy at any time and place. And no other type of training better prepares soldiers for combat than realistic live-fire exercises. To prepare our platoons for this future and for an upcoming deployment to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), we developed a convoy live-fire exercise (LFX). This LFX was designed to familiarize the antiarmor platoon with reacting to contact during convoy operations while the support platoon and soldiers from the 225th Forward Support Battalion developed the skills they needed to execute battle drills associated with convoy operations. The LFX was also designed to increase coordination and training with units that did not usually perform standard combat operations (convoys must always be considered combat operations). Convoy live-fire exercises are designed to integrate soldiers from both combat arms and combat service support units, and also to prepare soldiers and leaders to execute successful operations together in combat.

Soldiers and leaders often complain that our LFXs are "canned." Because of safety and range control requirements, many of the things leaders want to train on in an LFX format seem to be forbidden. But realistic LFXs are not impossible, as the following discussion will illustrate.

The intent of our convoy LFX was to train soldiers on convoy battle drills to the point where they could execute those drills without hesitation every time. To accomplish this, we had an old 5.56mm record-fire range on which fires from M16 rifles, M203 grenade launchers, and M249 machineguns were allowed.

To win approval to conduct the LFX, we had to submit a packet that described the overall tactical scenario and the necessary procedures for running the range. This packet also included a range sketch (Figure 1), showing the range fans of vehicles and the limit of advance for the dismounted troops that would assault downrange.

One major limitation imposed by range control was that only two vehicles could fire at the same time. Initially, we thought this would take away from the realism of the range. But after establishing two fixed firing fans (at Firing Points 4 and 9), we found we could have any type of convoy drive through the range and initiate contact on the vehicles we chose. To make this easier, we issued a convoy brief before each iteration, specifically instructing vehicles to stay a specific distance (50 meters) from each other. By initiating an ambush as a certain vehicle passed Firing Point 9A, a convoy could react to contact at the front, middle, or rear of the column.

Another condition of the range was that the M203s had to fire at specially built targets to ensure that the gunners did not damage the electronics on 5.56mm targets. For added safety, an observer-controller (OC) was put with each vehicle that would be firing during the iteration. This OC would make on-the-spot corrections of safety violations and assess casualties to see how the unit

would react.

Along with the packet, we included a detailed risk assessment that we hoped would convince anyone concerned about safety that every possible risk had been considered. The goal was to keep training as realistic as possible without violating safety requirements. This was reflected in the first part of our risk assessment, which listed all possible hazards and their effects on training when no safety controls were applied. The resulting factor showed a risk level too high to be considered worth the training value. The second part of the risk assessment listed all possible hazards and the controls that would be applied to reduce the risk factor. The greatly reduced factor now proved that the LFX could be very realistic and still be considered safe. This detailed format later became important in justifying the night-fire portion of the exercise.

Some of the training enhancements we used to increase realism included pneumatic machineguns and additional targets designed to simulate crew-served weapons, and a pneumatic artillery simulator controlled by the target operator from the range tower. SALUTE (size, activity, location, unit, time, and equipment) reports and situation reports radioed to the officer in charge from the convoy commander, along with convoy briefs and fragmentary orders, were used to enhance leadership training. The ammunition point and convoy route were also designed to keep LFX participants from seeing the range before they were actually on it (Figure 2).

In all, there were five convoy operation scenarios: *React to near ambush, conduct casualty evacuation, execute vehicle recovery, encounter and reduce obstacle,* and *break contact.* All of these were based on reacting to enemy fire while the convoy was performing some task.

For example, in the first scenario, the lead vehicle drove past Firing Point 9, and three targets popped up at 50 meters. A pneumatic machinegun and an artillery simulator went off at the same time to simulate an ambush.

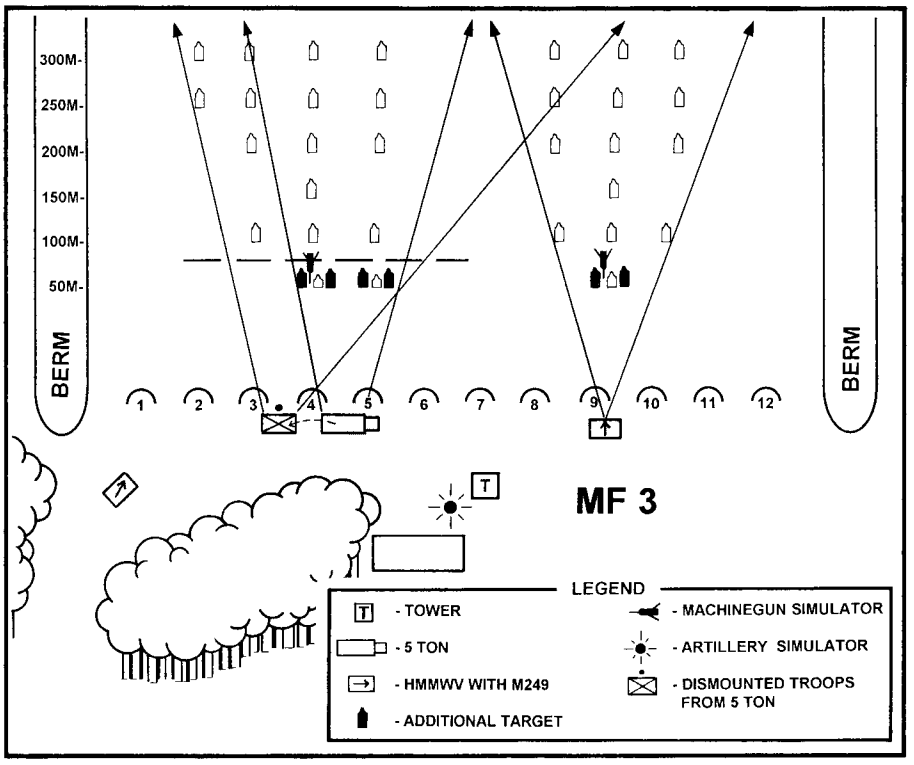

Figure1

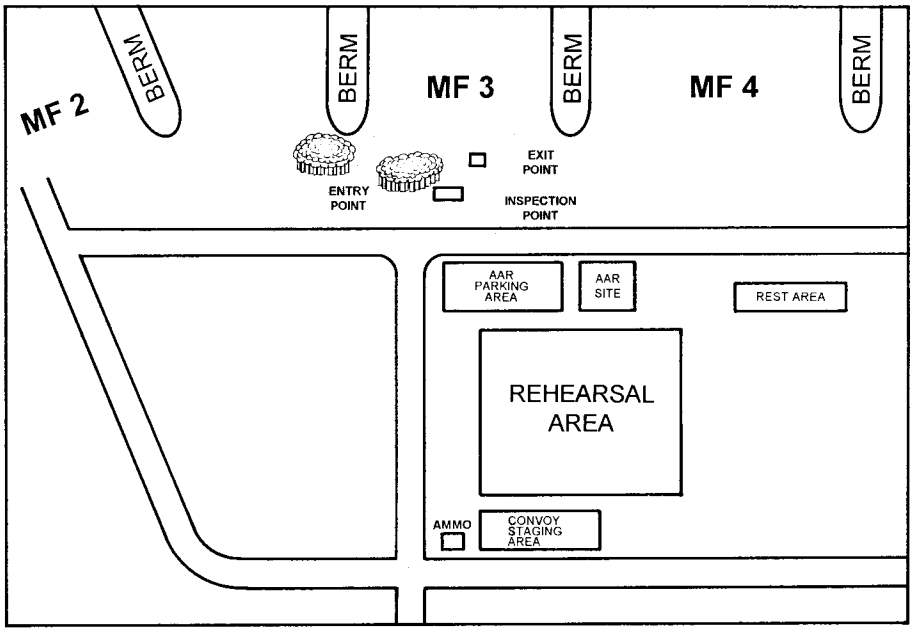

Figure 2

Simultaneously, two groups of three targets appeared on Lanes 4 and 5, and another pneumatic machinegun went off. The convoy leader, having determined that he could not get his vehicles out of the kill zone, ordered the lead vehicle to open fire while the rest of the troops dismounted to clear the ambush line. The lead vehicle reacted by initiating a herringbone movement and laying down suppressive fire toward the targets directly in front of him, while the rest of the convoy went through dismount drills.

An infantry platoon assaulted past the 50-meter targets on Lanes 4 and 5 to clear the ambush and establish security on the far side. The convoy leader then

sent his situation report to higher headquarters while his leaders continued to consolidate and reorganize.

Then the enemy counterattack started. Targets popped up to simulate the enemy's gradually moving closer, starting at 300 meters and working their way in toward 50 meters. The convoy leader had the lead vehicle continue suppressing the targets while everyone else remounted the trucks. Once the convoy was ready to move, they broke contact and moved out of the kill zone while continuing to fire at targets until all of the vehicles were safely out.

The other four scenarios were variations of this *react to near ambush drill.* The convoy mission, however, was altered to include *move to and conduct a casualty evacuation,* or *move to and conduct a vehicle recovery.* In each situation, they encountered an on-site ambush. The other two scenarios we incorporated were conducting convoy operations and encountering an obstacle/minefield and then being engaged by enemy overwatching the obstacle, which required a breaching operation. The final scenario was reacting to an ambush and conducting a break contact drill.

Once the vehicles were off the range, the NCOIC directed all vehicles to halt and have all personnel dismount. Safety NCOs then supervised the clearing of all weapons and conducted a brass and ammunition check. Once all personnel, weapons, and vehicles had been inspected for live ammunition, the NCOIC directed the vehicles to move to the parking area. From there, all personnel involved in the iteration moved to the AAR site, where the major lessons learned were reviewed. These lessons then became the focus for the next iteration.

At the end of the LFX, key leaders assembled for a discussion and recommendation meeting, which dealt with all the things that could make the range better and more realistic.

From this final AAR, we learned five major lessons:

- Planning for an event of this size should include several in-process reviews (IPRs) at least six weeks ahead to inform each participant of his role in the exercise.
- For special range set-ups, a whole day is needed to work out all of the bugs.
- A way of recording the iteration's marksmanship accuracy should be developed so that soldiers and leaders alike can see whether they are improving throughout the day.
- The *crawl, walk, run* training technique must be used with blank ammunition before conducting a live iteration. This should start with squad leaders training their men on battle drills, dismounting techniques, and individual movement techniques, and conclude with the convoy leaders supervising a full run-through of an iteration with blank ammunition.
- Many other things can be incorporated into a convoy LFX to add realism and improve training. These may include calls for fire, close air support requests, better operations orders, and fire support planning.

The convoy live-fire exercise, the first ever to take place at Schofield Barracks, tested the mettle of every soldier involved. The leaders were able to see how difficult it actually is to train soldiers on battle drills in a live-fire exercise as well as how important these drills are in keeping soldiers alive in combat.

Unit leaders also saw how important cross-level training is among several different specialties, from infantryman to medics to drivers to mechanics. Indeed, we all realized that, unless LFXs are conducted to train soldiers of various specialties to operate with each other in combat, neither units nor individual soldiers will be prepared for the confusion and stress of war.

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Platoon Attack
Role of the Platoon Sergeant and Platoon Leader

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During a platoon attack, the unit's top two leaders must work together. A platoon sergeant and a platoon leader who are in the right places at the right times, doing the right things will directly improve their platoon's force protection, increase the survivability of individual soldiers within the platoon, and improve the entire unit's chances of succeeding.

The effective use of the platoon sergeant can free the platoon leader to